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ABSTRACT

Hierarchical and decentralized organizational systems are both based on the assumption that power exists in a limited quantity to be divided up among those in the organization. Recent research indicates, to the contrary, that when managers allow their subordinates greater influence in the organization, not only does the job satisfaction and morale of the subordinates increase, but the subordinates are more responsive to the managers' wishes and requests. The manager thus gains control by giving control away. Tests of these theories in the public schools have demonstrated their application to principals and teachers. In addition, the satisfaction of teachers with their principals has been shown to relate directly to the principals' managerial style. (Author/PGD)

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Each ***Research Action Brief*** reports the findings of significant empirical research studies on a topic in educational management. From these findings implications are drawn for the operation of today's schools, thus serving as a guide for enlightened administrative action.

This ***Research Action Brief*** was prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management for distribution by the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Managerial Control: A Middle Way

Modern managers, whether secondary school principals or business executives, face a dilemma concerning the disposal of their power. They have probably been taught that hierarchical control is important to efficient administration and coordination of effort. On the other hand, they may also be aware that decentralization of control and decision-making can improve employee motivation. The perils of each are well known. Hierarchical control can evolve into rigid authoritarianism; decentralization can degenerate to chaos. Which then does the manager prefer? Or fear most?

Some organizational theorists have suggested that the dilemma is not real; at least it accents the wrong perspective. Despite their obvious philosophical dissimilarities, hierarchical and decentralized systems both share a common assumption about power. Both assume that power is a limited entity to be divided like a pie among dinner guests. The more guests admitted to the table, the smaller the portion for each.

But does power actually exist in fixed quantities, such that one person's gain in control must result in another person's loss? Arnold Tannenbaum and a number of other researchers have questioned this truism of organizational life. Their research points to a "middle way," as Tannenbaum describes it, between rigid hierarchical control and chaotic decentralization. Although most studies on variable levels of control have been conducted in private business organizations, the findings have application to the public schools.

Evidence

Organizations are controlling structures. They are the means of smoothly integrating diverse personal and collective behaviors and directing them toward a common goal. Idiosyncratic behaviors are circumscribed to conform to the organization's rational plan. "Control," concludes Tannenbaum, "is an inevitable correlate of organization."

The power of control is a dazzling lure. Though higher levels of tension, frustration, and sleeplessness are often associated with the executive exercise of power, power itself is "often understood as synonymous with prestige, status, social eminence, or superiority." The connection between power and organizational fidelity has often been noted: "The man who exercises control gives more of himself to the organization. He is likely to be more identified, more loyal, more active, on behalf of the organization." His powerless counterparts "are, in general, less satisfied with their work situations . . . and their dissatisfaction often has the quality of apathy and disinvolvement" (Tannenbaum).

Control and job satisfaction. The correlation between an employee's job satisfaction and his or her involvement with the decision-making processes of the organization has been demonstrated in a considerable volume of research. It is clear, Bachman and Tannenbaum conclude, that "individuals who have relatively high control over their jobs are more satisfied

with their jobs than individuals with lower control." But they also note that not much is known about "how a given individual may experience different degrees of satisfaction in different areas of activity as a function of differing amounts of control." Not all aspects of every job can be expected to provide equal amounts of satisfaction. Can we be sure that what accounts for employee satisfaction is truly the level of personal control over decision-making?

To explore the sources of job satisfaction, Bachman and Tannenbaum questioned workers about areas of their lives over which they exerted varying amounts of control. In one study they questioned a group of clerks in an insurance company about the amount of control they had over twenty office systems. These systems included rules, procedures, suggestions, and discipline policies covering such areas as "lunch," "planning," "training," "transfer," "error report," and "overtime." They also asked the clerks to indicate their satisfaction with each area. For a period following the survey, the clerks were given greater control in some areas while the control in other areas was held constant.

When researchers resurveyed the office a year later, they found the "greatest increases in satisfaction" occurred "with those systems providing the greatest increase in control." They concluded that the "over-all effect of the manipulation was to increase substantially the degree of decision-making by the clerks, with a corresponding increase in their general satisfaction with the company and supervisory personnel."

In a second study, Bachman and Tannenbaum surveyed several hundred workers about aspects of their private lives, work experiences, and "general, political, social, and cultural environment." The workers indicated their satisfaction (or lack of it) with food prices, income tax, popular music, telephone service, their most recent job, their personal health, and the city where they lived, among other things. Estimates of the amount of control the average worker had over these areas of life were provided by a panel of social scientists. In this case as well, the workers were most satisfied with those aspects of their lives over which they had most control.

Reciprocal control and mutual influence. Implications of the above studies are clear: the wise supervisor will put as much control into the hands of subordinates as is commensurate with good management. Unfortunately, many administrators, operating on the assumption that power exists in fixed quantities, believe that power passed to subordinates is power lost.

But Tannenbaum argues that the amount of control in an organization can increase and that all members can share it. To illustrate in a practical way how control expands, Tannenbaum compares two hypothetical supervisors. The first is indifferent to his workers. He ignores their suggestions and recommendations. Because of this treatment, his subordinates, sensing their own lack of influence with him, respond to his suggestions and demands with indifference.

The second supervisor interacts with his workers and solicits their opinions. They, in turn, are responsive to his requests. Tannenbaum states, "To the extent that this may contribute to effective performance—and we have reason to believe that it does if the supervisor also has influence with his manager—the group itself will be more powerful or influential."

Tannenbaum cites a study by Likert, another contemporary organizational theorist, that demonstrates how the total amount of control in an organization can vary and how the influence of the employee is associated with that of the supervisor. Likert asked nonsupervisory personnel in thirty-one separate departments of a large industrial service organization to indicate how much influence the department manager, the supervisors, and the men themselves had over "what goes on in your department."

Once the data were collected, the departments were divided into three groups according to their levels of productivity. Employees in the high-producing departments rated themselves as having "more influence as a group" than did employees in the two other groups. What is even more striking is that the workers in these same high-producing departments gave higher ratings of control to their managers and supervisors than workers in the low-producing departments gave to theirs. Likert and Tannenbaum conclude that "influential workers do not imply uninfluential supervisors or managers."

The phenomenon of reciprocal control and fluctuating levels of power was further explored by Bachman, Smith, and Slesinger in their survey of salesmen in thirty-six branch offices of a national firm. They asked the salesmen about the amount of control they exerted as a group on office policies and how much control their office manager exerted. The survey attempted to verify the existence of mutual influence between supervisors and salesmen and to demonstrate that the differences in power were not merely individually perceived, but were in fact objective qualities inherent in the office situation.

The researchers sought to explore the relationship between satisfaction, influence, and managerial styles. Toward this end they asked the salesmen to choose the best explanation for "***why*** they do the things their supervisors suggest or want them to do":

A. "I admire him for his personal qualities, and want to act in a way that merits his respect and admiration."
B. "I respect his competence and good judgment about things with which he is more experienced than I."
C. "He can give special help and benefits to those who cooperate with him."
D. "He can apply pressure or penalize those who do not cooperate with him."
E. "He has a legitimate right, considering his position, to expect that his suggestions will be carried out."

(In research literature, these bases of power are referred to respectively as referent, expert, reward, coercive, and legitimate power.)

The findings, like those of Likert's study, show that influence is reciprocal: "The degree of control exercised by an office manager over his subordinates was positively related to the control they exercise over him." In the most productive offices both salesmen and their office managers experienced high

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levels of control. The study concludes that "the most effective offices can be characterized by the following high total control syndrome: high levels of interpersonal control, and control over the office, by both manager and salesmen; relatively greater reliance by the office manager on expert and referent power . . . ; and high mean levels of performance and satisfaction with the office manager."

Principal's base of power and influence. Compared to an insurance office, the subordinate-supervisor relationship in the public schools seems quite different. Hornstein and his coauthors note that "except for some constraints with regard to curricula, teachers have almost complete freedom to organize their work within their classrooms. . . . Thus, in contrast to organizational roles that have been studied in the past, public school teaching is characterized by individual, independent performance." Do the above findings concerning control, satisfaction, reciprocal influence, and bases of power also apply to the relationship between principals and teachers?

To find out, Hornstein and his colleagues replicated the Bachman, Smith, and Slesinger study in the public schools. In their attempt to measure levels of control and influence, Hornstein and his associates asked teachers the following questions:

1. In general, how much say or influence do you feel the ***principal*** of your school has on how ***your school*** is run?
2. In general, how much say or influence do you feel the ***teachers*** as a group have on how ***your*** school is run?

Answers to these questions yielded a measure of "total within-building influence." Teachers were also asked:

3. In general, how much say or influence does the ***principal*** of your school have with ***teachers in your school*** when it comes to activities and decisions that affect the performance of their classroom activities?
4. In general, how much say or influence do the ***teachers in your school*** have on the ***principal*** when it comes to his activities and decisions that affect the performance of your school?

Answers to questions three and four yielded a measure of "total interpersonal influence" in the school. Answers to questions two and four yielded a measure of total ***teacher*** influence; answers to questions one and three yielded a value for total ***principal*** influence.

In addition, the researchers asked teachers to identify their principal's base of power. A general measure of satisfaction with the principal was also taken.

Hornstein reports that, in accord with earlier studies, the influence between principals and teachers is reciprocal: "when teachers perceive their principal's level of influence to be high, they are likely to perceive their own level of influence to be relatively high." Levels of influence are related to satisfaction. The greater the total influence for both groups, the "more favorable is their [teachers'] evaluation of the system and the greater is their satisfaction with the principal."

The amount of influence teachers attribute to principals is associated with the base of power from which the principal operates. Greater levels of principal influence are associated with a view of the principal as an expert.

A study by Balderson further explores the relationship between the principal's base of power, teacher satisfaction, and the qualities of schools associated with the different kinds of principal power. Balderson asked 426 teachers in forty-one elementary schools to select which power bases they perceived their principal as employing: personal (same as referent in Likert's study), expert, reward, coercive, or legitimate.

Balderson discovered "systematic differences in staff responses" that were related to the power bases. He noted that

teachers in a majority of the schools viewed the principals as utilizing power based on expertise. The "reward" category was insignificant, perhaps, as Balderson suggests, because principals have little to offer in the way of inducements or because teachers themselves find this method of operation repugnant. Schools that rate the principal as using "expert" power received high scores for "teacher morale, teacher satisfaction with principal's performance, and the degree to which the principal favored (1) teachers doing an effective job helping students learn, (2) teachers experimenting with new ideas and techniques, and (3) teachers suggesting ideas to improve the school." Without exception, schools with "coercive" principals had the lowest scores on these measures.

Implications

An impressive array of research challenges the traditional assumption that power in an organization exists in limited quantities. In doing so, the research challenges as well some of the traditional practices that have grown out of this "all-or-none" law of power. For principals in particular, the research points in some interesting managerial directions.

Principals should take careful stock of the level and distribution of power in their schools. Their evaluation should consider the answers to such questions as, Is the principal comfortable with the amount of his own control over the school? Is the control used effectively? Does the principal have influence with teachers? Do teachers feel influential, and do they evidence high satisfaction with their work? Does the school function at a high level of efficiency and productivity?

If the answers to these questions point to low levels of influence and employee morale in the school, the principal might well consider whether he has been overly cautious about parceling out power to the school's staff and even to students. Knowing that the power in an organization is not limited but is capable of expansion, the principal will look for ways to increase the total amount of power for the benefit of the school.

Because power is reciprocal, an increase in the power of teachers should lead to a corresponding increase in the power of the principal. Conversely, the principal who is stingy with power also circumscribes his own power.

In his attempt to raise the levels of control and thus the efficiency of his school, the principal is best aided if he is seen as an impartial expert sensitive to the concerns of his professional staff. Balderson notes that as teachers become more specialized, they are "less inclined to accept suggestions and demands from people in hierarchically superior positions unless the suggestions and demands are seen to promote more effective performance." It lies in the principal's interest to be seen as an expert.

Being viewed as a depoliticized expert does not imply passivity or lack of power. In Balderson's data, expertise was positively associated with the frequency of attempted influence.

Principals should not fear the sharing of power. Nor should they be afraid that higher levels of control will kill employee satisfaction. In a paradoxical system where power and control can grow in mutual abundance, the principal should not fear being left out at the power table.

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